

Virginia welcomes first female infantry officer

First Lt. Candice Bowen graduated Feb. 1, 2019, from the U.S. Army's Infantry Basic Officer Course and became the Virginia National Guard's first female infantry officer. She joins a small group of other women who have successfully completed training at Fort Benning to become infantry Soldiers and officers since the career field was opened to women in 2016.

"This isn't really for me," Bowen said. "This is important for the people who are coming after me."

Bowen graduated from IBOLC alongside 187 of her peers at the Maneuver Center of Excellence at Fort Benning, Georgia. During the ceremony, her father, a retired Army sergeant major, pinned a blue infantry cord to her uniform, signifying her new career field.

"My dad has been there with me through this whole journey," Bowen said, explaining that her father had been there for her first Junior ROTC parade and every military milestone since. Bowen graduated and earned her commission from Penn State. Her dad was there for that, too, rendering the final salute of his active duty military career to his daughter on the day of her commissioning.

Read more: <http://vanguard.dodlive.mil/2019/02/06/12576/>



The Virginia National Guard's first female infantry officer, 1st Lt. Candice Bowen, has her blue infantry cord pinned to her uniform by her father Feb. 1, 2019, during her graduation from the Infantry Basic Officer Course at Fort Benning, Georgia.

Virginia National Guard News Headlines

VDF takes part in statewide amateur radio exercise

Members of the Virginia Defense Force took part in the Perfect Storm statewide amateur radio exercise Jan. 19, 2019, in Richmond and Lynchburg, Virginia, and the VDF was among the nearly 80 amateur operators and agencies registered for this annual event.

Read more: <http://vanguard.dodlive.mil/2019/01/25/12585/>

Profita named new VNG command senior enlisted leader

Command Chief Master Sgt. James J. Profita will succeed Command Sgt. Maj. Alan Ferris as the Virginia National Guard's command senior enlisted leader, according to an announcement made Jan. 24, 2019.

Read more: <http://vanguard.dodlive.mil/2019/01/25/12534/>

Puckett named new VNG command chief warrant officer

Chief Warrant Officer 5 Joseph W. Puckett has been named as the Virginia National Guard's new Command Chief Warrant Officer, according to an announcement made Jan. 24, 2019.

Read more: <http://vanguard.dodlive.mil/2019/01/24/12590/>

Saber Soldiers provide crew evaluations for active-duty cavalry squadron

Virginia National Guard cavalry Soldiers provided vehicle crew evaluators for their active-duty counterparts from Fort Bragg, North Carolina, during gunnery training Jan. 15 – 26, 2019, at Fort Pickett, Virginia.

Read more: <http://vanguard.dodlive.mil/2019/01/28/12542/>

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Mentors provide valuable guidance to ChalleNGe cadets

Twice a year the Virginia National Guard Commonwealth Youth ChalleNGe Academy graduates cadets from the five and a half month long residential portion of the program. But when the cadets take off their uniforms and return home, they don't stop being cadets. Instead they transition to the 12-month, non-residential portion of the program. And just because they're no longer watched by cadre in uniforms doesn't mean the ChalleNGe program doesn't have an eye on them.

When each cadet returns home, they do so under the watchful eye of a volunteer mentor who is responsible for helping cadets reach their post-residential education and employment goals. Their mission is to act as an advocate for the cadet, help their cadet stay focused, and encourage him or her to make sound decisions.

"The cadets who have strong, grounded and committed mentors are our most successful cadets," explained Dr. Delphoney Kargbo, the Commonwealth ChalleNGe mentor coordinator. "Their success or lack of success in the nonresidential phase is primarily based upon what the mentors do with the cadets to keep them focused and keep them moving ahead."

Commonwealth ChalleNGe is the Virginia component of the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program, a 17-and-a-half-month program designed to promote academics, attention to detail, time management, and leadership, while promoting self-esteem, confidence and pride.

Although the mentors are a critical component of the ChalleNGe program, they're also something staff members find themselves struggling to find for each class. Cadets are supposed to come to the program with a mentor but that often doesn't happen. In other cases, cadets arrive with mentors who are then eliminated during background checks. In some cases, the mentor just becomes less committed and engaged as time goes on.

"It's essential for the mentors to be on board from day one, from residential to the post-residential phase," said Deborah Thomas, a career counselor at ChalleNGe. "But we are struggling to keep them committed for 12 months."

The five-and-a-half-month-long residential portion of the program at Camp Pendleton State Military Reservation focuses on preparing at-risk teens and high school dropouts for the General Educational Development test and future employment, military service or higher education opportunities.

During this residential phase, mentors are focused on building a rapport with the cadets through phone calls, letters and attendance at family mentor day. After week 13, mentors are asked to help cadets with things like filling out job applications and visiting Tidewater Community College.

In addition, mentors are asked to come in and speak to the cadets who've gotten in trouble.

"They respond better to the mentor than they do to the parent," Kargbo explained. "The mentor can get a cadet to do something that a parent has been trying to do for years. We expect mentors to have that type of impact."

After cadets complete the residential phase of training, they



Hector Pabon, a first-time mentor for the Virginia Commonwealth ChalleNGe Youth Academy, meets with a cadet Feb. 2, 2019.

begin the 12-month, post-residential phase in which they work with their mentors and career counselors to ensure they are either placed in employment, continue their education or enter military service.

During this year-long period mentors are required to meet with the cadet in person at least four times and send monthly reports to ChalleNGe on what and how the cadet is doing. This is where the mentor is most vital.

The next ChalleNGe class begins March 26. If you'd like to find out more information about becoming a mentor to a cadet, please visit <http://www.vachallenge.org/mentors/> or contact the mentor coordinator at 757-491-5932 ext. 240.

Read more: <http://vanguard.dodlive.mil/2019/02/04/12495/>

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